

I Just Called by theamiableanachronism

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Summary: In which Mike tries and fails to make a very important supercomm call

I Just Called

He was nuts.

Completely nuts.

Mike drummed his pencil against his notebook, a frenetic drumbeat that didn't even come close to the pace his heart was keeping.

The feeling had come out of nowhere.

Well, not exactly nowhere.

He'd been thinking about El. Again.

How could he not, when the one day a week they could see each other in person, Saturday, was tomorrow?

He'd be nuts if he WASN'T thinking about her.

But he was used to thinking about her. She'd only come home three weeks ago. The realization that she was alive had firmly cemented her place in his thoughts. And his heart.

But this feeling, this sudden intensity, was something new. The way his heart had suddenly started running a mile a minute and his breath had caught in his chest.

He was surprised he hadn't realized it before but:

he was in love with Eleven.

In total he'd only known her for two weeks, but if you counted that year in between, like he did, he'd known her for a lot longer. Even though she'd never responded, he'd always hoped–felt–that she was listening. And she was. The whole time.

But even if you didn't count that year, which he knew most people wouldn't, in just two weeks he'd felt... a connection to El that he'd never felt with anyone else. He guessed that was why it had been so hard to accept that she was anything other than alive.

But a two-week connection was one thing.

Love was another.

He was only fourteen. He thought this was the kind of thing he'd be thinking about in ten years. At the very least.

He'd never really thought about what it meant. Love. He guessed he loved his family. He didn't have to like them all the time, but didn't everyone love their family? At least a little? For keeping them fed and clothed?

And he loved his friends. He knew that. Will and Lucas and Dustin. And Max. But it wasn't the same. It was different. He wanted to see them, wanted them to be safe. But nothing to make his heart go crazy like this.

That's what was different about El. He thought about her all the time, wondering if she was happy, if she was sad, if she was safe. How she smiled, what she thought about things, how she saw the world. That was more than he ever thought about his family or even the Party.

And he knew he didn't think about Dustin's eyes or Lucas' laugh anywhere near half as much as he thought about El's and there was no reason to miss holding either of their hands. For obvious reasons.

Absently, he curled his fingers into his palm and looked at the supercomm.

He had to tell her. Now, before he lost the courage.

He dropped his pencil and reached for the supercomm, letting out a long slow breath as he extended the antenna and pressed the button.

"El, do you copy? Over."

He was surprised his voice wasn't shaking.

A second passed and there was a crackle of static followed by a familiar voice.

"I copy. Hello Mike." She paused. "Over."

A smile curved his lips and it was only after he pressed the button that he noticed his heartbeat had slowed down. He almost felt calm.

"Hey El. How-how are you doing?"

Another pause. "Good." He could hear the smile in her voice and immediately he was picturing the way her eyes crinkled at the corners, the way her brown eyes sparkled.

And that was what set his heart beating again.

"Um, El?"

"Yes?"

He opened his mouth but no sound came out. Already he could feel his confidence slipping away, like water through his fingers. Internally, he groaned.

"I—"

He sighed and leaned his forehead against the supercomm, defeated.

"I'm excited to see you tomorrow, El."

She paused again, longer than before, and when her voice finally came back over the airwaves, she sounded confused.

"Me too."

Mike pinched the bridge of his nose. Coward.

"Mike?"

"Yeah?"

"Are you okay?"

Mike smiled wryly. He'd just lost the nerve to tell El that he loved her after making a call specifically to tell her just that, but no, he was fine.

"Yeah El. I'm okay. I'll see you tomorrow."

"Don't forget the movie."

He smiled. "I won't."

"Good night Mike."

He sighed. "'Night El."

He dropped the supercomm and fell back on the bed, hands over his face.

The next morning, he hid his bike in a cluster of shrubs about fifty feet from the road, then walked the rest of the way on the circuitous route Hopper had laid out to the cabin.

All that night and into the morning he'd thought about his failed call but only felt worse the more he did.

Nothing had changed about the way he felt. Just hearing her voice had been enough to convince him.

Maybe it just wasn't the right time last night.

He made a sharp right turn and ducked an overhanging branch.

Eventually, the trees parted and the cabin came into view. A smile crossed his face as he noticed the shade of the front window had been lifted to expose a tiny corner of the glass. And the person looking through it with eager brown eyes. Mike's heart leapt and his smile only widened as El's eyes met his and she disappeared from the window to come bursting through the front door, dashing across the porch, down the steps, and into his arms. Half the air was squeezed out of his lungs, but he didn't mind, especially when she pulled away just enough to kiss him on the cheek.

"You're here," she said, eyes crinkling at the corners.

"I'm here," he said stupidly and still a little breathlessly, letting himself be led back inside, where Hopper was waiting at the table, unsuccessfully hiding a grin behind a mug of coffee.

"You guys know you gotta wait til you're inside. No more running out

like that, you hear me?"

El glared at him, impatient to sit with Mike, but he didn't waver, just cocked a paternal eyebrow.

"You hear me?" Hopper repeated.

"Yes," she finally said.

"Okay then." He shook his head and looked at Mike. "Hey kid, how ya doing? How was the trip?"

"Fine, thanks." Mike slid his backpack off his shoulder and unzipped the top, taking out the rental tape of "The Wizard of Oz". Last week, El had told him about reading the book with Hopper but how he'd never brought the movie home. Naturally, he'd gone to the rental center the very next day.

"Any problems? You hid your bike and everything?"

Before Mike could answer, El saw the movie and jumped up from the couch. "You brought it!"

"Yeah!" Mike said to her, grinning widely as she dashed around the couch the VCR. He looked back to Hopper. "No problems. Everything's hidden."

"Good."

"Mike." El had already pressed play and was waiting for him on the couch. He took a step toward her but Hopper asked, "What time's your mom expecting you back?"

Mike glanced at El. "I told her I was sleeping over at Will's. I'll head over there later."

"Did you tell Joy—"

"Jim." Eleven cut in sternly, fixing Hopper with an impatient glare.

"I told Mrs. Byers," Mike nodded. "She knows."

"Okay good." He winked at Mike, releasing him to sit next to El, before glaring back at El with a twinkle in his eye. "Sorry. Enjoy your movie." He stood up and walked across the living room to his bedroom. "If you two need me I'll be in here. Got some paperwork I need to finish." El nodded absently as his door shut with a click, watching the usual slew of movie trailers with an annoyed frown.

"Commercials," she murmured before picking up the remote and fast-forwarding until the MGM Lion reared its head in the middle of the screen. With that, she set the remote down and nestled her head on Mike's shoulder, finding his hand and intertwining her fingers with his.

But halfway through the opening sepia-toned credits, she paused the movie.

"What's the matter?" Mike asked.

She lifted her head, eyes piercing as she studied his face. "Why did you call last night?"

His stomach swooped and he cleared his throat.

"Um...well..." He met her eyes and wondered if she could hear every frantic beat of his heart. Just hearing her voice over the supercomm had been enough to make him completely lose his nerve, but having her here now, so close he could smell her shampoo, was so much worse.

A tiny wrinkle of concern appeared between her eyes and he took a deep breath. It was now or never.

"IjustcalledtosayIloveyou."

He wasn't surprised when El frowned in confusion, since he barely understood what he'd just said. And he'd been the one saying it.

Bracing himself against the back of the couch, he turned until his body was facing her. She watched him expectantly, still concerned, so he took her hands in his.

"Um, El...I called last night to say that... that I love you." Her eyes

widened but he kept going, unable to stop now that he'd started. "I—I've always loved you El. I don't know why or even how it took me so long to—to realize. But I do. I love you El. So much."

He watched her face, waiting for the moment where her frown would deepen and she'd drop his hands in disgust because how could someone like her ever love a wastoid like him?

But she didn't frown.

And her grip on his hands only grew stronger.

El's entire face lit up, to the point that she was positively glowing.

She inched forward until their knees brushed each other then leaned in and kissed him. His eyes fluttered closed and he added dizziness to his list of symptoms, along with a rushing in his ears and a pounding in his chest. When she pulled away, he didn't open his eyes, thinking if he did, he'd wake up still in his own room on Friday night, agonizing over whether or not to call her.

But then he heard her voice.

"I love you too, Mike."

His eyes snapped open and a smile spread across his face.

"Really? You do?"

El's eyes sparkled as she nodded and without thinking, he leaned forward to kiss her again. His heart must have grown three sizes because it felt like it was filling his entire chest.

He pulled away, still feeling a little dizzy as he smiled into her beaming face.

He loved her. So much.

And she loved him back.

It was crazy. Absolutely crazy.

But he wouldn't have it any other way.

El's eyes flicked toward the TV screen. "Do you still want to watch the movie?"

Mike grinned. "Definitely." El waited until he'd turned around again and rested her head on his shoulder. He let his head rest on top of her curls.

Neither of them had let go of each other's hand.